MIT's Oldest and Largest Newspaper

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The Tech
Established 1881

Volume 139, Number 11

Thursday, April 25, 2019

WEATHER, p. 2

THU: 59°F | 46°F
Sunny

FRI: 52°F | 48°F
Showers

SAT: 56°F | 45°F
Rain

150-block meal plan cancelled for the fall

Current min. plan to stay for now

By Rujul Gandhi
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

The rollout of the new 150-block minimum meal plan will be paused for the next semester, Director of Campus Dining Mark Hayes announced in an email Wednesday. The email mentions inadequate communication and student involvement among reasons for pausing the change.

In a statement emailed to *The Tech*, Hayes wrote, "After hearing from students—including Undergraduate Association and DormCon leaders, House Dining Committee (HDC) members, and individual students—and heads of house, Dean [for Student Life] Suzy Nelson, DSL Executive Director for Administration Peter Cummings, and I felt that we hadn't gathered sufficient student input to make the meal-plan changes, nor had we done an adequate job of communicating them."

As a result, the meal plan options for Fall 2019 will be the same as this year's. The prices of all meal plans have been increased in accordance with the Rate Increases FAQ published in March. The 125-block plan has also undergone a price increase, from $1,950 to $2,065 per semester.

Hayes wrote in his statement, "The six-percent price increase on all plans was announced in March in conjunction with MIT's statement on financial aid. The increase is driven by the steady rise in operating costs—including labor and food—and is consistent with previous years' price increases of between three and six percent."

"The pause will allow us to engage stakeholders for help with designing a meal plan structure that meets our goals for the dining program," Hayes wrote in the email statement. According to the announcement on Wednesday, Nelson has asked Hayes and Cummings to form a working group comprising students, heads of house, and staff to review the findings of a 2017 dining survey.

The working group is expected to address MIT Dining's goals, which include maximizing choice, providing value, enhancing the undergraduate dining experience, improving food quality, and fostering community building. This working group is in addition to the Lobdell Dining working group and the HDC. MIT Dining is also looking into the addition of a grab-and-go lunch location on east campus, Hayes wrote in the email announcement.

In early April, MIT Dining announced a new minimum required meal plan for upper-level students living in dining hall dorms. The new plan would have increased the number of meals per semester from 125 to 150, and reduced the amount of dining dollars from $290 to $100. The meal plan price per semester would have also increased from $1,950 to $2,225.50.

In response, students voiced concerns over increased prices, lower flexibility, and unavailability of

Meals, Page 2

KATYA BEZUGLA—THE TECH

MIT Ridonkulous hosted its annual Footwork performance in Walker Memorial the evening of April 19. Many dance groups were invited to the event, including those from Northeastern University, Boston University, and Harvard University.

Commencement date moved one week earlier starting 2020

Number of spring term teaching days to remain the same

By Kaitlyn Hennacy
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

Faculty voted in a faculty meeting April 17 to approve changes that will result in commencement ceremonies being held one week earlier. The changes will impact spring registration day, Patriots' Day weekend, and finals week, and they will take effect May 2020.

As *The Tech* has previously reported, the proposal for the change was headed by the Office of the Vice Chancellor (OVC). Commencement was moved because having Commencement in the first week of June forced some graduating students to delay their employment or internships and those living in apartments to pay an extra month's rent, Vice Chancellor Ian Waitz said in an interview with *The Tech*. Waitz added that the earlier Commencement date will avoid conflicts with research conferences, provide more time for dorm maintenance, and allow summer programs such as Interphase that use campus housing to extend.

Changes to the academic calendar

The approved changes to academic calendar section of the Rules and Regulations of the Faculty keep the number of spring term teaching days the same. Spring finals week will end two days earlier. Additionally, one grading day and four administrative days between finals week and Commencement will be removed so that Commencement can be seven days earlier.

Commencement, Page 2

Joint 6-9 major approved April 17

Bachelor's in Computation and Cognition to provide two tracks

By Whitney Zhang
NEWS EDITOR

Students can now receive a degree in Bachelor of Science in Computation and Cognition (Course 6-9). The degree was approved in the faculty meeting April 17. The degree is a joint program with the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) and the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences (BCS).

The coursework includes foundational math classes as well as introductory, foundation, header, and advanced EECS and BCS classes, according to the degree proposal.

The degree provides two tracks, one for those who are interested in human and machine intelligence, and another for those who are interested in neural systems, according to Michale Fee, associate dean of the Brain and Cognitive Sciences Department, in an interview with *The Tech*.

For example, students who are interested in intelligence may choose to take 6.006 (Introduction to Algorithms) and 6.009 (Fundamentals of Programming) for their foundational EECS courses, whereas students who are interested in neural systems may instead select 6.002 (Circuits and Electronics). Students are not required to select a track, but may be constricted by prerequisites, said Fee.

Students will have a primary advisor in BCS and a second advisor in EECS. Both advisors will have the ability to approve registration. BCS was chosen as the department for the primary advisor since EECS currently advises a much larger number of students than BCS.

Fee described the development of the new major as a natural progression from the existing collaborations between faculty in EECS and BCS, interdepartmental graduate students, and the many Course 6 students taking Course 9 classes. In fact, Fee noted, there are already more Course 6 than Course 9 students in Course 9 classes. Fee said that the intersection of computation and cognition is a rapidly growing field and that this degree would be attractive for both graduate students and industry.

Fee said that the major was first discussed by EECS and BCS faculty last spring and was then officially proposed in the faculty meeting Nov. 26. Originally, the departments proposed two separate majors, one for human and machine intelligence and another for neural systems, but they concluded it was better to combine them in a flexible manner.

There are 50–100 students expected to declare this major, based on a web survey, according to the proposal. Fee expects that two-thirds to three-fourths of the students will be focused on human and machine intelligence. Fee is not concerned about an increase in students in Course 9 classes since many Course 6 students are already in Course 9 classes.

Fee said that he was unsure of the impact of the College of Computing on the joint major, but noted that the representatives for the College of Computing seemed to put an emphasis on joint educational programs in their presentations, and said that he personally felt that the

Majors, Page 2

IN SHORT

Drop date is today. Students have until 11:59 p.m. to submit approved changes.

First-years — including those who are choosing to remain undesignated — must bring their signed **Choice of Major form** to the Student Services Center (11-120) by the end of today.

SpringFEST will be held Friday at the Johnson Athletic Center. Doors open at 7 p.m. and the concert will start at 8 p.m.

Want to **write for** *The Tech*? Email join@tech.mit.edu to get started.

Send news and tips to *news@tech.mit.edu*.

ASSEL ISMOLDAYEVA—THE TECH

A Japanese tea ceremony demonstration at the Hanami Festival is held on April 18 in the Student Center.

THE SOUND OF NATURE
Looking back from the 24th century. **ARTS, p. 5**

AUNTIE ANSWERS
Should you be afraid of playing into a stereotype in a relationship? **CAMPUS LIFE, p. 8**

22-ENG
Students will soon be able to opt for a flexible version of the Course 22 major. **NEWS, p. 3**

THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY
The necessity of affirmative action in a segregated world. **OPINION, p. 4**

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WEATHER

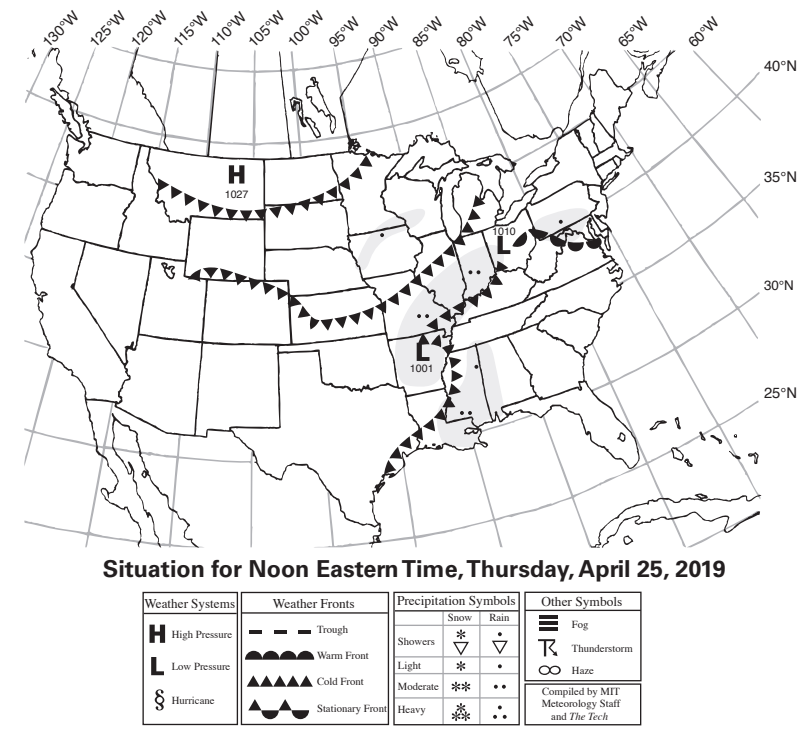
April showers...

By Reagan Zimmerman
STAFF METEOROLOGIST

We've all heard the saying, "April showers bring May flowers." The old anecdote is true this weekend, as more showers are heading our way. There should be breaks in the rain throughout the weekend, so be sure to enjoy the sun while it's out. Speaking of April showers, try not to drown in your psets and midterms. We only have a month left of the term! Spend the rainy days inside studying for your last few midterms, and hopefully these April showers will bring you a better GPA in May.

Extended Forecast

Today: Clear and sunny. High of 59°F (15°C). Light winds.
Tonight: Cloudy and foggy with an overnight low of 46°F (8°C). Light winds.
Tomorrow: Cloudy all day with a chance of showers in the afternoon and early evening. High of 52°F (11°C). Low around 48°F (9°C). Winds from the southeast at 15 mph.
Saturday: Rain ending in the early morning, then partly cloudy the rest of the day. High of 56°F (13°C). Low of 45°F (7°C).
Sunday: Sunny with a chance of showers in the afternoon. High around 59°F (15°C).



Situation for Noon Eastern Time, Thursday, April 25, 2019

Final exams period shortened to four days from five

Commencement, from Page 1

Spring registration day will now take place on the last day of IAP. The length of IAP remains unaffected. Spring term classes will begin on the Monday instead of the Tuesday following IAP, and Patriots' Day weekend will be shortened from four days to three days. This allows classes to end two days earlier, on Tuesday rather than Thursday. Finals will begin the Friday of the last week of classes, and continue Monday through Wednesday of the next week.

Students in the Class of 2020 and beyond will receive their diplomas a week earlier, and non-graduating students will have an extra two days of summer break.

Adjusting to the new schedule

Students will have four days instead of five days for final exams. This increases the chances that students will have multiple exams on the same day. Waitz said instructors would need to stick more rigorously to the results of the schedule optimization algorithm to avoid conflicts and back-to-back exams. According to Waitz, students and faculty have a history of requesting that their finals be moved to earlier dates after the optimization algorithm is run, which creates more exam conflicts. In the future, fewer of these requests will be accommodated.

Faculty will now have one and a half weekdays to finish grading finals instead of three. This change is preferred by faculty over the current system, since the one and a half grading days fall on weekdays, instead of on Memorial Day weekend, as prior, Waitz said. In addition, most of the problems with grades coming in late have not been with classes with finals, according to Waitz.

Instead of having six administrative days between the final grade deadline and the Hooding ceremony, there will now only be two. After Memorial Day, the individual departments will have one day to review and submit grades, and flag students with missing requirements. The next day, the Committee on Academic Performance and Committee on Graduate Programs will create the degree list. Hooding and Commencement will follow immediately on the Thursday and Friday of that week.

The cut in the number of administrative days means a tighter timeframe for finalizing degrees, but Waitz believes that improved Institute-department communication will facilitate the process. "We're going to have to tell everyone that if we're going to gain this extra week of summer, you really do have to get your stuff in on these deadlines," Waitz said.

The number of days between final exams and Commencement has decreased from fifteen to eight. Senior Week, which typically spans six days and runs into early June, will be pushed earlier for the Class of 2020 and beyond. According to an email from Stella Yang '20 on behalf of the Class of 2020 Class Council, Senior Week will still occur in the days between final exams and Commencement.

Addressing concerns

According to a survey administered by the OVC in January, slightly more undergraduates were in favor of the changes than against them. For the graduate students, staff, faculty, and postdocs who responded, the preference for the changes was stronger. The survey received over 700 responses, including 240 from undergraduates.

Students' concerns with the changes in the academic calendar include a shorter Patriots' Day weekend that will give students less of a break after CPW. However, Waitz said that the weekend following soon after spring break mitigates this, and the OVC will remind faculty to be mindful that many students play an important role in CPW.

The change in the finals schedule was met with mixed reactions. While some students preferred the old five day finals schedule, others saw benefit in a four day finals period broken up by a weekend, Waitz said.

Waitz proposed solutions to conflicts with athletic competitions and religious holidays, as well. "We will have a special event for athletes who are headed to national competitions, for them and their families in regalia with the president, prior to the time they have to go off to competitions."

Shavuot, a Jewish holiday, will coincide with Commencement roughly every 10 years. "There too, we've learned from our peers that they're able to put in place accommodations for families and those students to enable them to observe the holiday and at the same time participate in Commencement. So we're working with Rabbi Fisher on how to do that, and how to do that well," Waitz said.

According to an FAQ on the Office of the Vice Chancellor's website, the Institute Events office has determined that there has historically been enough hotel capacity in the last week of May to accommodate MIT's Commencement. Hotel rates for the last week of May are historically lower than for the first week of June, although it is unknown how the change in Commencement dates will impact pricing.

Waitz saw changing the academic calendar to move Commencement earlier as an optimization problem that required multiple iterations of tweaking the schedule. "We were faced with conflicts and I think we found really nice MIT ways to solve them, where we just put in a little ingenuity and creativity and try and create a solution that maybe doesn't solve all the problems but is really welcoming and celebratory and inclusive."

Computing Infrastructure group holds forum

Group focuses on computing resources, potential partnerships, and department needs

By Zoe Sheill
STAFF REPORTER

The Computing Infrastructure working group of the College of Computing presented its progress at a forum Friday afternoon. The group said that the goals of the computing infrastructure of the College will be to improve education software in classes, promote open access, and improve data privacy. They also presented possible ways to implement the new infrastructure and fielded questions from the audience.

The group was represented by Glen Comiso, senior director for Institute Affairs, Susan Silbey, chair of the faculty, Benoit Forget, Nuclear Science and Engineering associate professor, and Christopher Hill, EAPS principal research engineer.

Forget said that the main goals of the working group were to "identify the current and future computing needs of campus for research and education, and evaluate the pros and cons of proposed approaches."

One critical topic was whether MIT should use cloud computing resources or computing resources created within the Institute. Forget was concerned that "MIT provides very sparse direct funding to support research computing," in some cases providing a tenth of the resources of peer institutions.

Lizhou Sha '18, a researcher at the Kavli Institute and former chair of the Student Information Processing Board, said the Institute should have students contribute to building the infrastructure. He said that if the Institute gave students the correct amount of mentorship and resources, it would "ensure we can build something that works."

Forget agreed, responding that the successful Athena project, the campus-wide distributed computing environment for educational use, started with a specialized and dedicated group of students; therefore, a similar model might help for the progression of College of Computing infrastructure.

Forget also said that ideas involving partnering with nearby institutions to develop infrastructure for the College had been discussed. Hill said that he "see[s] regional synergies with neighboring universities like Harvard and Boston University."

Faculty and students attending the forum also brought up department-specific concerns. Kurt Fendt, senior lecturer in the Comparative Media Studies department, stated that the department often used grants for Digital Humanities projects to "pay for outside services like Heroku," a cloud-based deployment and hosting platform. He also mentioned that database and hosting services were "hard to hand over to an outside company because of the legal structure of MIT."

Fendt wrote in an email to *The Tech* that representatives from both the Technology Licensing Office and Office of the General Counsel admitted that MIT sometimes doesn't have good solutions for approving agreements between MIT departments and companies created from MIT research, specifically when these spinouts use other companies' hosting services. He said that developing computing infrastructure at MIT may be able to provide at least "short to mid-term" solutions to this issue.

Ed Brignole, assistant director of Cryo-EM, the cryogenic electron microscopy facility, expressed at the forum that there was a need for centralized computing moving forward. He wrote in an email to *The Tech* that microscopes in his department generate 8 terabytes per day of data, and that his computing needs include infrastructure to carry out analysis on this data and provide other computing systems access to it. In his email, he also mentioned that the "strength of MIT is that [its] infrastructure is very decentralized," allowing different labs to be more independent. However, he also stated that there might be a need for centralized computing for shared resources and that the Institute could work on this moving forward.

Meet your
fellow tech staff.
(aka, your new 3 a.m.
pset support group)

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MEng program for 6-9 to be voted on in May

Majors, from Page 1

College of Computing's mission is "well aligned" with that of the 6-9 program.

Fee said that there has been a "universally positive response" to the new major and that students are excited.

Additionally, there has been an associated Master of Engineering in Computation and Cognition (6-9P) proposed, which will consist of an additional four graduate classes in EECS and BCS, two mathematics classes, and a thesis. The program will be voted on at the next faculty meeting May 15, according to Fee.

Student petition received after decision, Hayes says

Meals, from Page 1

healthy or dietary-restriction-friendly meals in dining halls. These concerns were also brought up in a meeting of the HDC April 4.

A petition to MIT Dining to change the minimum meal plan back to the 125-block gathered 1,225 signatures. According to Hayes' statement, this petition was received by MIT Dining and DSL after the decision to pause the change had been made.

Members of the MIT community can provide ideas for improving dining on campus by emailing foodstuff@mit.edu.

Flexible Course 22-ENG degree approved

New major trims existing requirements, allows students to choose focus area

By Whitney Zhang
NEWS EDITOR

Students can now receive a degree in Bachelor of Science in Engineering as Recommended by the Department of Nuclear Science and Engineering (Course 22-ENG). The degree was approved in the faculty meeting April 17. The course provides instruction in the fundamentals of nuclear science and engineering while allowing for increased flexibility in course selection.

The core classes of 22-ENG are the same as those that comprise the Nuclear Science and Engineering (Course 22) major. Additionally, students in 22-ENG will either select a pre-approved set of classes in a focus area, such as nuclear medicine, energy or nuclear policy, or fusion energy or plasma science;or propose a focus area to the department for approval, according to the degree proposal. In total, the major requires 189 units of coursework, of which 72 units are in the focus area.

As with Course 22, students will select their advisor from the department's five Undergraduate Officers, said Michael Short, undergraduate chair of the department, in an interview with *The Tech*. Short explained that the undergraduate officers work in many interdisciplinary fields and so would be able to advise interdisciplinary students well.

According to the proposal, the new major was formed to cater to students "interested in careers outside of traditional nuclear industry jobs, including nuclear medicine, clean energy technologies, fusion, quantum engineering, and modeling/simulation."

The proposal also notes that many students who work in the department's labs have not declared Course 22 because the major does not provide enough flexibility; the new major hopes to alleviate this issue. Additionally, the major hopes to capture students who may have an interest in the department, but leave for Course 2 or 6 for better employment opportunities, according to Short.

Short said that the major has been in development for about a year, and has been through review by the Committee on the Undergraduate Program, the Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement, Committee on Curriculum, the Academic Council, and two faculty meetings. Short said that input helped create ideas for focus areas. For example, Anantha Chandrakasan, dean of MIT's School of Engineering, suggested a focus area on computing. However, Short said, the "original vision" of the major remained unchanged.

Short explained that the new major removes quantum physics, waves and vibrations, and analog electronics from the required Course 22 classes. Additionally, instead of taking both fission reactor engineering and fusion reactor engineering, students choose one. Similarly, students choose to do either the senior capstone or senior thesis. The removal of these five classes creates room for students to select electives outside of the department.

Short said that these classes were removed because they were the "dangling ends of the curriculum — advanced classes that were not required for any further class in the major." Classes like thermal-fluids engineering and differential equations, which Short believes are fundamental to understanding nuclear science and engineering, will remain.

Short said that although the removal of "some classes will [cause students to] miss out on skills," students would still have the option of selecting these courses, and these courses are not pertinent to all students. For example, Short said that quantum physics and waves and vibrations would not be relevant to students interested in nuclear policy, since "waves and vibrations and quantum physics are not what convince congressmen and the general public."

Although no new classes have been added explicitly because of the major, Short said that the department is already continuously adding new ones, such as fusion energy.

Short hopes that 20–30students will declare Course 22-ENG each year, compared to the current 10–20 per year that declare Course 22, said Short. Slight enrollment increases are expected for Course 22 classes, according to the proposal.

Short expects that many students will declare Course 22-ENG instead of Course 22, causing the number of students in Course 22 to decline. Short also expects that many students will double major in Courses 2-A, 8-flex, 3A, and 6.

Short stated that feedback from other departments has been unanimously positive and students have also been excited.

ch's MLB Ch

By *The Tech* Sports staff

MLB Postseason. In the American League, th
Series against Minnesota with ease to advar
ponents, the Texas Rangers, recovered from t
gainst the Tampa Bay.
, the Philadelphia Phillies swept Cincinnati
ng a ho-hitter by Roy Halladay. They face the
ainst Atlanta in which every game was decic
claim their league pennant and advance to
eigh in, with department bragging rights on

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Hello, Athletes, look at the sports page, now back to you, now back to the sports page, now back to you. Sadly, your sport isn't there, but if you started writing for *The Tech*, it could be. Look down, back up, where are you? You're on the front page. Anything is possible when you write for *The Tech*.

sports@tech.mit.edu

MIT-CHINA FORUM
DOING SCIENCE
WHILE CHINESE IN AMERICA
The challenges Chinese scientists face in this new political climate
SPEAKERS
YANGYANG CHENG is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Cornell University and a member of the CMS experiment at the Large Hadron Collider. She received her PhD in physics from the University of Chicago in 2015 and her Bachelor's in Science from the University of Science and Technology of China's School for the Gifted Young.
XIAOXING XI is the Laura H. Carnell Professor and former Chair at the Physics Department of Temple University, and former Professor of Physics and Materials Science and Engineering at the Pennsylvania State University. He received his PhD degree in physics from Peking University and Institute of Physics, Chinese Academy of Science, in 1987.
MODERATOR
YASHENG HUANG is the Epoch Foundation Professor of International Management at Sloan School of Management.
TUESDAY, APRIL 30TH 2019
4:30-6:00PM | BUILDING E51-345
MISTI
MIT CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
MIT SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
MIT

Solution to Baidu
from page 6

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Solution to Yandex
from page 6

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Solution to DuckDuck
from page 7

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Solution to As In-
from page 6

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S	L	A	V	■	E	D	E	N	■	H	E	N	R	I
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OPINION OPINION OPINION

PODCAST REVIEW

Echoes of the Slow World

A beautiful and thoughtful exploration of our future and its sounds

By Torri Yearwood
ARTS EDITOR

Every now and then something will cross my path in the internet enough times that I check it out. Occasionally, I'll enjoy it, and, very rarely, I will love it. The first episode of *Forest 404* pulled me into the future world of wires and steel in which the story of the podcast unfurls.

The basic idea is this: after a data crash called 'the Cataclysm,' humankind carries on in a vast, mechanical, and moving city, producing and consuming faster than ever before. Everything about our times — the slow times, they call it — has been either forgotten or lost. Everything, that is, other than the media held by the Department of the Convocation, which is tasked with freeing up valuable space for the city to grow. Our protagonist, Pan (Peal Mackie), works there as sort of a reverse librarian: she catalogues information — the voices and images of the slow times — for deletion. And she is good at her job, clearing 40–50 terabytes of data per week. Unfortunately for her, this job is more dangerous than one might think. In the nine episodes that the series spans, we are thrust deep into the dark secrets of both the city that she loves and her boss — and would-be romantic partner — Daria (Tanya Moodie).

In the first episode, we catch a glimpse of the title's meaning: first, Pan finds a recording of a rainforest, but there hasn't been any kind of nature since the Cataclysm. From here the podcast takes on an eco-futuristic aesthetic, exploring the sounds of a lost environment — courtesy of the beautiful sound design of Graham Wilde — and its effect on our nature-deprived descendants. The series is broken into nine twenty-five minute chunks with accompanying talks from experts on nature and our real-life understanding of how it affects us and the nature sounds that Pan fights desperately to understand.

If this sounds like your kind of thing, I wholeheartedly recommend that you give it a listen. The characters are well-written, the world is interesting, the sound is magnificent, and all of it is beautifully believable. The format is clever and engaging, pooling the shared experiences of the three main characters in a way that works wonderfully, both in and out of its universe. I'm honestly just disappointed at how short it all is — I still have many questions, but that, I suppose, is part of its beauty.

★★★★☆

Forest 404

Produced and directed by Becky Ripley

Written by Timothy X Atack

Starring Pearl Mackie, Tanya Moodie and Pippa Haywood

Available on BBC Sounds

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DuckDuckGo

Solution, page 3

22+			48×			189×		
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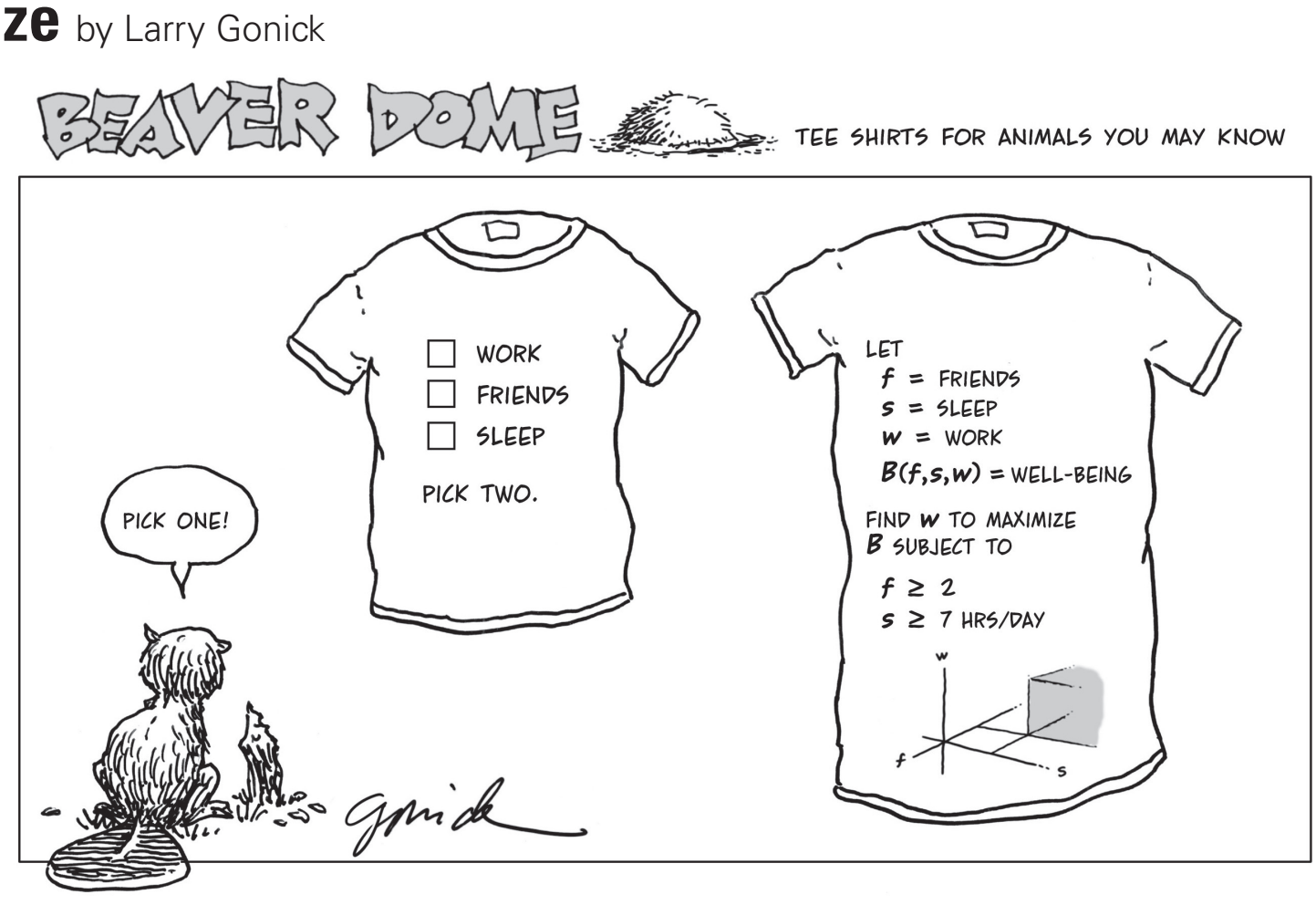
Instructions: Fill in the grid so that each column and row contains exactly one of each of the numbers 1–9. Follow the mathematical operations for each box.

Optimize by Larry Gonick



The Tech *is partnering with MindHandHeart to share a series of cartoons by cartoonist Larry Gonick.*

FUN FUN FUN

ADVICE

Talk, talk, talk

Auntie Matter on crazy people and meaningless chatter

By Auntie Matter

If you have questions for Auntie Matter, please submit them at tinyurl.com/AskAuntieMatter. Questions have been edited for length, clarity, and content.

Dear Auntie Matter,

I am upset with my boyfriend because I told him I was upset about something, and he didn't really respond. I don't want to press the issue because we haven't been dating very long, and I prefer being annoyed at him to him being annoyed at me. I also don't want to play into the stereotype that women are too emotional. However, this is really bothering me. Should I bring it up?

— Crazy New Girlfriend

Dear Girlfriend,

To answer your question, yes, you should bring it up, and preferably in person, if it's not especially time sensitive. It sounds like whatever it was upset you enough that you've been cogitating over it, and in these situations, it's usually helpful to talk about it.

You claim two things are preventing you from starting this conversation: you don't want him to be annoyed at you, and you don't want to play into a stereotype about crazy emotional women.

First, he might not get annoyed at all, but rather be happy you brought it up so that the two of you can resolve it. Considering his lack of response to your first attempt to bring it up, he probably doesn't even realize you're upset. (Men can be oblivious that way.) Even if he does get a little annoyed, it likely will be brief and a small price to pay for resolving the issue. And if he gets too annoyed with you — out of proportion to the issue — you might not be compatible with him.

Second, you should be how you are even if your relationship is relatively new and even if you think you're playing into a stereotype. You don't need to change, nor are you likely to. You may be a crazy woman (although Auntie suspects it's unlikely), and if you are, you should own it, unless you think it's a real problem you need to fix about yourself.

Finally, Auntie perceives some overthinking here. Until you can resolve this issue, you should try not to focus on it too much.

Dear Auntie Matter,

Sometimes when I'm surrounded by my friends, I feel a disconnect, just a sense of not belonging, and I often feel like I just can't relate to the meaningless chatter that most people of my age want to engage in. I often just want to leave the room immediately, since I feel like I am about to burst into tears. Will I ever get a sense of truly belonging anywhere?

— Isolated by my Brilliance

Dear Isolated,

Your letter concerns Auntie, and not just because you seem to take yourself a touch too seriously. Feeling like you are going to burst into tears out of a sense of disconnect is not a normal response. It seems like there may be issues in your life, or with your mood and outlook, that extend past your friend group. In all seriousness, you ought to consider a visit to MIT Mental Health. However, that aside, Auntie has some ideas about the issue you raise specifically with your friends.

First, try not to think of the conversation that your friends are having as representative of all "people of [your] age." It seems improbable indeed that in a city full of young people, you are the only one who sees through the "meaningless chatter." If the topics your current friends like to talk about are not interesting to you, you can find new friends. Furthermore, wondering if you will "ever get a sense of truly belonging anywhere" is not a helpful way of framing the question. For starters, worrying about forever is only going to increase your distress right now — think about how you can have meaningful conversations in the next week instead of thinking about whether you will have meaningful conversations in your whole life. Second, why is your standard "truly belonging?" It is possible that you will only ever feel you "belong" with a small group of friends — expecting to "belong" in the larger world might be too much to ask.

Overall, it seems like your issue with your friends might indicate that you are incompatible with them, but the way you are currently thinking about it does not seem helpful. You can change your friends, but you should also probably change your thinking.

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